

Waste Reduction Options for Business & Industry

Maine State Planning Office

Waste Management & Recycling Program



Source reduction, also referred to as waste reduction, is defined as activities designed to reduce the amount or toxicity of waste generated, including the design and manufacture of products with minimum toxic content, minimum volume of material, and/or a longer useful life. Source reduction is fundamentally different from the other strategies of solid waste management, such as recycling and disposal, because it takes place before materials have been identified as waste. For this reason, source reduction provides the best opportunity to save your business money. It allows you to avoid the expense of handling a portion of your waste stream because you do not create that waste to begin with.

Listed below are several waste reduction options for four business types: office, restaurant, retail and industry. Options listed for one type of business, however, may also be appropriate for another.

Office

- Reuse scrap paper for notepads or telephone messages;
- Use computerized mail or post memos on central bulletin boards to reduce photocopying;
- Maintain central files instead of making multiple copies;
- Institute maintenance practices to prolong the life of copiers, computers and other equipment;
- Make two-sided copies;
- Use refillable toner cartridges;
- Ask suppliers to reduce packaging;
- Order supplies in bulk;
- Ask vendors to eliminate polystyrene padding - if a package does need cushioning, ask them to use shredded paper or other recyclable packing material;
- Ask suppliers to provide products in recyclable reusable packaging;
- Purchase reusable dishes, coffee mugs, and utensils to replace disposable ones (switching to reusable dishware can cut disposal costs by 10% in companies with employee cafeterias);
- Ask to be removed from junk mailing lists: write to the company directly, obtain a form at your local post office to remove names from third-class mailing lists, or write to Mail Preference Service, Direct Marketing Association, PO Box 9008, New York, NY 11735-9008;
- Ask employees to share magazine and newspaper subscriptions;
- Use white paper, which has a higher recycling market value than colored paper;
- Donate excess or scrap paper to day care centers, schools or other nonprofit organizations;
- Buy office supplies with recycled content (particularly post-consumer), and nontoxic ingredients.

Restaurant

- Serve beer and soft drinks on tap, reducing both the cost of buying beverages and of disposing or recycling cans and bottles;
- Use reusable napkins, dinnerware, placemats, and tablecloths;
- Use ceramic coffee cups instead of paper or plastic; Offer incentives to customers who bring their own mugs;
- Supply condiments in bulk (i.e. cream, sugar, mustard, ketchup);
- Donate excess food to a local food bank; compost food waste, or give it to a pig farmer for feed.

Retail

- Offer items in bulk wherever possible;
- Package sales in returnable/reusable containers; use incoming packaging such as boxes and bags to package materials for customers;
- Ask vendors to reduce packaging, use recyclable packaging, take back non-recyclable packaging, and reuse corrugated cardboard boxes;
- Offer incentives to customers who use reusable canvas bags for purchases, sell canvas bags with your company logo on them, or encourage customers not to take a bag;
- Ship products in recycled or recyclable paper packaging rather than foam;
- Offer items containing recycled content;
- Weed out duplicate names on your advertising mailing list; subscribe to Mail Preference Service (see Office hints for address).

Industry

Because industrial wastes vary according to industry type, few generalizations can be made about its composition.

- Reduce use of hazardous materials wherever possible;
- Reuse or recycle industrial wastes in-house;
- Purchase more efficient equipment and institute maintenance practices to prolong life of equipment; negotiate service contracts;
- Implement a quality monitoring system;
- Switch to reusable pallets and containers; offer broken pallets to employees for reuse;
- Purchase supplies in bulk;
- Ask suppliers to reduce the amount of packaging, use recyclable packing, take back non-recyclable packaging; and reuse corrugate cardboard boxes;
- Recycle scrap materials through nonprofit organizations, such as resource centers that distribute scrap materials to educators for craft projects;
- Replace virgin feedstock with recycled materials whenever possible.

Start Simple and Record the Results!

No matter what type of business you are, it is important for you to start out simple. Implement one or two simple source reduction measures and then build upon these when you are comfortable with the new program. Also, before the implementation of the program, take note of the amount of purchasing and waste disposal patterns, as well as the associated costs. Compare this information to data obtained after the program has been up and running for 6 months in order to get a sense of the savings that you can realize through source reduction!

For more information, please contact:
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